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150th Anniversary
OF THE ERECTION OF
The Fleming House
FLEMINGTON, N. J.
MAY 23, 1906



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HIRAM E. DEATS
1906

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ANNUAL MEETING OF D. A. R. OF NEW JERSEY

Celebrate the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of Flemington by placing a Beautiful Tablet on Oldest House.

As announced in our last week's issue, Col. Lowrey Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution of Flemington unveiled the memorial tablet on the Fleming house on Bonnell street on Wednesday, May 23rd. It was also the date of the annual meeting of the New Jersey Society of the D. A. R. and a large number of the members of the organization took advantage of the pleasant day to pay a visit to Flemington. Most of the visitors arrived on the noon train over the Central Railroad of New Jersey and proceeded to the Presbyterian Church where they were received by Mrs. Hiram E. Deats, Regent of Col. Lowrey Chapter; Miss Ellen Mecum, of Salem, State Regent; Mrs. William D. Kearfott, of Montclair, Vice-President General for New Jersey, and Mrs. E. G. Putnam, of Elizabeth, State Vice Regent. A bountiful luncheon had been provided in the church parlors by the Woman's Auxiliary of the Presbyterian Church. At two o'clock the regular program was held in the main audience room of the church,

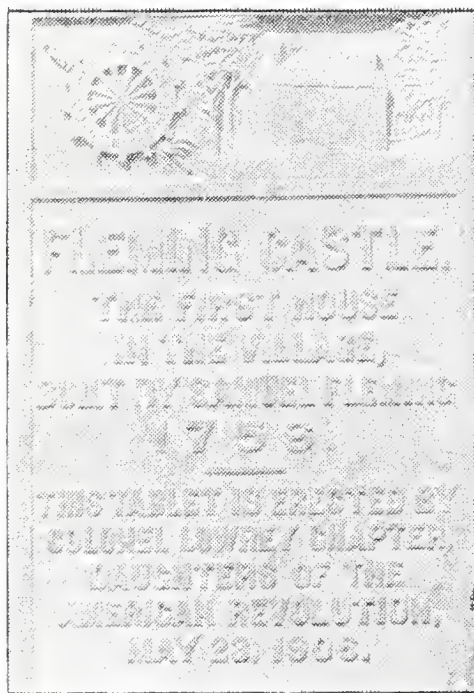
opening with an organ prelude by Mr. Norman Landis, followed by an invocation by the Rev. J. L. Miner, pastor of the Baptist Church. Mrs. Deats then made a brief address of welcome, to which responses were made by Miss Mecum, Mrs. Kearfott, Mrs. Putnam and Mrs. Terry, of New York. Telegrams of regret were sent by Mrs. Donald McLean, President General of the National Society and Mrs. Althea Randolph Bedle, widow of ex-Governor Bedle, of Jersey City.

Mrs. Herbert Turrell, Regent of the Orange Mountain Chapter, then addressed the assembly on settlement work among the Italians in that section of the State. The time was too short to permit of any more than an outline of this important movement.

Our own Mr. Vosseller then gave a brief history of Flemington, although he claims it is not worthy the title of history. The paper is printed in full below, and our readers will find that it is a brief, chatty and entertaining sketch, well suited to the occasion on

which it was delivered.

Mrs. Judiah Higgins sang the Star Spangled Banner, after which an adjournment was taken to the Fleming house, on Bonnell street, where the tablet, which is illustrated below, was unveiled and a brief address made by Hon. John L. Connet.



Judge Connet had scarcely begun his remarks when he was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Donald McLean, President General, who had unexpectedly arrived on the afternoon train. She was called to the platform and introduced to the audience for a three minute talk. She graphically told how in addition to an hour's wait in Somerville she had been obliged to wait for another cause, being informed that "the milk cans to be distributed along the South Branch were of more importance than the President General of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution." Mrs. McLean was then obliged to hasten away to catch the three forty-five train for New York and Judge Connet finished his address, which we also give our readers in full below.

The tablet was presented to the Chapter by Robert Reardon & Son, and it has doubtless surprised many of the people of Flemington that we have had in our town for so many years an artist and workman capable of such beautiful work. As soon as Mr. Reardon heard of the suggested marking of the Fleming house he promptly offered to furnish the tablet. In addition to the thanks of the Chapter, which he has already received, we are sure that all the citizens of the town will unite in thanking him for this important addition to its other attractions.

While Judge Connet was speaking Miss Sunderlin secured some excellent snapshots, one of which we reproduce. We regret, however, that it shows less than a quarter of the audience gathered there. The schools were closed at three o'clock to enable the pupils and teachers to be present.

The city newspapers all made mention of the affair. The "Newark News" printed the greater part of both addresses, together with an illustration of the house and tablet and portraits of Mrs. Deats and Mrs. Kearfott.

We must not omit to mention the generous way in which the citizens of the town added to the occasion by decorating the buildings and hanging out the flag. Over two hundred flags are said to have been counted in front of residences and other buildings.

Mr. Vosseller Said :

Madam President General, and Daughters of the American Revolution :—

I appreciate the honor conferred upon me by your courteous invitation to place before you, briefly, some of the interesting events in the history of our old village.

Two hundred years ago the large tracts of land in this part of our State, containing thousands of acres and owned by Wm. Penn, Daniel Coxe and others, began to be broken up into smaller parcels, and to be occupied by actual settlers. There were more wolves here than sheep, more bears than horses and more Indians than white folks. And back of this gather all the clouds and darkness of uncertainty.



FLEMING CASTLE, 1756-1906

An Indian tribe had its encampment just back of yonder hill. Tucca-Mirdan, the chief, had his wigwam, however, near the log cabin of John Philip Kase, which stood near the present dwelling of Mr. O. B. Davis, on Mine Brook. Between these families the closest friendship existed and the children of the Kase family felt as much at home in the wigwam of the chief as in their own log house.

In 1746 Samuel Fleming was licensed to keep a tavern in a log house and in 1756 he built "Fleming Castle", which Judge Connet will tell you more about presently.

After the building of this magnificent structure, the place began to be spoken of as the Fleming settlement, later as Fleming's and still later Flemington. This "Castle" stood a little back from a road which ran from a mill on the South Branch on the site of the present

Rickafellow Mill, to Howell's Ferry on the Delaware River. This road crossed the Trenton road, which is now our main street, at a sharp angle just in front of this church. Tradition says that this Trenton road ran thro' a splendid huckleberry patch.

Near the "Castle" was a well, now covered over, into which a little girl fell and was drowned. Perhaps this tragedy furnished the ghost that haunted this house afterward and which was seen majestically rising from a potato heap and dissolving into thin air, on one occasion, when the lady of the house had the temerity to visit her cellar about midnight.

In 1750 Thomas Lowrey bought six hundred and fifty square feet of land from Samuel Fleming, who afterward became his father-in-law, and built a store on it. This was the first store in this region and became the centre of a

large business. It stood in front of this church, a little to the west and in what is now Mr. James E. Brodhead's front yard. It was near the intersection of the two roads referred to and was replaced in 1775 by a larger and better building by Thomas Lowrey and this later one was the store which was raided on Dec 14th, 1776, by a detachment of Harcourt's Cavalry, the Sixteenth Regiment, known as "The Queen's Own", which was the crack Cavalry Regiment of the British Army and at that time was with Cornwallis at Trenton. This raid was made with the double purpose of capturing Col. Lowrey, who was one of Washington's Commissaries, and the provisions he had collected in his store for the use of Washington's Army. That story, however, is too long for this occasion.

In 1762 Thos. Lowrey and others surveyed and laid out building lots along the Trenton road and sold a number of them. This no doubt determined the direction of our Main Street. In 1767 he and James Eddy, a merchant of Philadelphia and one of the owners of these building lots, gave one of them containing a half acre for the use of a Baptist Church. This emphasized the direction of Main Street and later on the other road was closed, and even some cherry trees which marked its direction near the "Castle" have disappeared.

Thos. Lowrey built a house on the site now occupied by Mr. Hugh C. Nevius, just south and east of this church. Soon after his marriage this house was burned. A colored boy belonging to him got offended at a young man, an employee, and built a fire under his bed, explaining that he "didn't want to burn the house, but the young man." During the fire, the housekeeper, an old lady, kept calling out, "Do try to save the most valuable things", while she herself was trying to save an empty barrel with both heads out. A really handsome house was afterward built on this site with bricks imported from England. The two spacious front rooms were finished with beautiful cornices and the fire places framed with handsome tiles. When the Court House was burned, the prisoners were kept in this house under

guard for one night, and the next day sent to Somerville. A later owner "improved" this house by tearing out the cornices in which he found several pieces of English silver money and a two-edged dagger. He also took out the tiles from the fire places and covered over the brick walls with stucco. In spite of all this vandalism it is a handsome house yet. In 1789 Mrs. Lowrey (Esther Fleming) was one of the matrons in charge of the ceremonies at Trenton on that memorable occasion of Gen. Washington's reception, and passage under the triumphal arch at that place, and her daughter Mary was one of the thirteen lovely young girls who strewed flowers before him as they sang

"Welcome Migtby chief once more,
Welcome to this grateful shore;
Now no mercenary foe
Aims again the fatal blow—
Aims at thee the fatal blow.
Virgins fair and matrons grave,
Whom thy conquering arm did save,
Build for thee triumphal bowers :
Strew, ye fair, his way with flowers ;
Strew your hero's way with flowers."

By the way, can any "Daughter" tell me what music they sang on this occasion and who wrote it?

In 1785 Flemington, which probably contained not more than twelve or fifteen houses, became the county seat of Hunterdon County. In 1791 a Court House was built. These forward steps were taken largely thro' the influence of Jasper Smith, who was a lawyer, and a man of great energy and public spirit. He was a devout church member and had a great deal to do with the organization of the Presbyterian Church of Flemington in 1791.

The first edifice of the Presbyterian congregation was built in 1794 in one corner of the grave yard, with a tavern in front of it. In 1856 the congregation bought the tavern property and erected their second edifice in its place. The congregation outgrew this building during the ministry of Rev. Dr. Geo. S. Mott, of blessed memory, and in 1883 replaced it with the church we are occupying to-day. Only seven pastors have ministered to this congregation which has had a life extending over

one hundred and fifteen years.

In 1776 Col. Charles Stewart became one of Washington's staff, a position he occupied until the close of the war. After the war he moved to Flemington and lived in a house that stood near the residence of the late John C Hope well. Washington held him in high esteem. He and Mrs. Washington were frequent visitors at his house. His daughter Martha married Capt. Robert Wilson, who was wounded at the battle of Germantown and died in 1779. Mrs. Wilson was distinguished for her beauty, for her brilliant and cultured mind and for her great executive ability. When her father was away in the army, she took entire charge of the estate, managing his large farming enterprises to his entire satisfaction. Mrs. Ellet in her book, "Women of the American Revolution", devotes a whole chapter to Martha Wilson. Gen. Washington was very fond of her only daughter and frequently held the child on his lap and kissed her. She married John Myer Bowers and after the war received marked attention from Mrs. Washington. They were on such friendly terms that they got out their sewing or knitting when visiting. Mrs. Bowers relates that on one occasion Mrs. Washington ravelled a set of old satin chair covers, inherited by her. She had the material carded and spun with the addition of cotton yarn woven in alternate broad and narrow stripes, the broad being of white cotton and the narrow of crimson silk. Out of this fabric she had two morning dresses made for herself.

Gov. Jno. Reading bought six hundred acres of land just out of our village along the South Branch. He built two fine residences, which are still standing, one occupied by Mr. Jacob Polhemus, near the Valley station, and the other by Mr. George W. Campen. The bricks of which the latter was built, in 1760, were imported. That house, too, has lost many of its charms by being modernized.

Gov. Reading had seven sons and three daughters. The sons were active in the Revolutionary struggle. Five of them settled hereabouts and exercised

a strong influence for good in state, church and educational matters. One of his descendants gave the money for the building of Reading Academy, which is now our High School.

In the grave yard of the Presbyterian Church lie the remains of at least six Revolutionary soldiers. With one exception, these graves are unmarked. Major John Howe had a "friend" who placed a bombastic and ridiculous inscription on his grave stone. If the others could know about it they doubtless would thank the Lord that they died without such a "friend" and be reconciled to lying in unknown graves.

One of this number was Capt. Thos. Gearhart. To him and Capt. Daniel Bray and Capt. Thos. Jones was assigned the direction of that most difficult and hazardous enterprise of collecting the boats to carry out Washington's brilliant achievement at Trenton. He carried a bullet in his knee, but when the doctors offered to cut it out he refused, saying, "No: I got that ball in the Revolution and I mean to carry it as long as I live", and he did, tho' it made him a cripple for life.

When a tired, hot and dusty visitor steps off the train at our Central station and looks down our Main Street, a sense of comfort and refreshment takes possession of him at once, for he sees a cool, sprinkled avenue, with substantial sidewalks, flanked by well-kept lawns bright with flowers, and trees arching overhead as far as the vision extends.

If he goes sight-seeing, among other things he will find six churches, two fine buildings housing our public school with a corps of thirteen teachers, a beautiful monument dedicated to the memory of those who died for their country, a Public Fountain for the refreshment of man and beast, a Court House, interesting because of its age; an up-to-date public building for county uses, three lively newspapers, a free public library and reading room, a park, a generous water supply, a first-class sewerage system, gas, electric lights, etc., etc., and a Woman's Club that does things. To them we are indebted for our Public Fountain. They also transformed a patch of waste land, which had become an eyesore by rea-

son of neglect, into a thing of beauty and to-day we are proud of our Park and it gives promise of much greater beauty in the years to come. This Club also is the backbone of our Free Library and Reading Room. They have created also a spirit of village improvement, which shows on all our streets and on our lawns as well. Their latest endeavor is to teach the little girls of the village to sew, and a weekly meeting for that purpose is largely attended, and the results surprisingly satisfactory.

He will find a much smaller organization also, a Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, making its influence felt as you see to-day. Also a musical organization which for years has rendered the oratorio of the Crucifixion on Good Friday night without cost to the audience and which year by year, with the aid of great soloists from the cities, is presenting one or another of the great masterpieces, like the Messiah, The Elijah, etc., at a nominal cost, which gives to the community musical opportunities not usually to be had outside the cities.

And last, but not least, he will see one of the handsomest liberty poles in the State, from which "Old Glory", that emblem of freedom, is flying to-day, in honor of this meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Mr. Connet's Address was as Follows :

It is eminently appropriate that some recognition should be made of this ancient fabric, because of its age, history and traditions. If these walls could speak, I have no doubt they could tell us many things that we of this generation cannot possibly know.

Aside, perhaps, from some log huts, this was the first house built here, and was the inception and foundation of this beautiful village. It should stand as long as any house in the village remains.

It is fitting too that such a tablet as you Daughters of the American Revolution, have, through the kindness of the present owners, placed upon it, and which will presently be exhibited to your view, should mark it, so that all passers-by may read and learn in some degree its history.

To all I wish to say that this memorial was wrought by and is the gift of one of our townsmen, Mr. Robert Reardon, who takes a deep interest in historical matters, to Col. Lowrey Chapter, of your estimable and patriotic order, and is placed here by that Chapter.

Many of the early settlers of this community were of Irish nativity, and among those who came from Ireland at an early day, and settled here was Samuel Fleming. He purchased a considerable quantity of land in this vicinity, and a part of that land consisted of the territory upon which Flemington is now located. He has the honor of being the founder of this Village, and from him it takes its name.

Although previous to his coming here other white men had purchased large tracts of land, the neighborhood was in some degree inhabited by Indians, and I have no doubt much of the land was covered by forests. Just west of us there was quite an Indian settlement, belonging I believe to that vast tribe that had its hunting grounds in New Jersey, the Delawares. One of the Chiefs of the tribe sits buried in an old cemetery a few rods from us. I say sits buried, for the tradition is that he was buried in a sitting posture, with all his paraphernalia of war and the chase about him, and that all night on the night of his burial a wild religious dance was kept up.

A part of the land purchased by Samuel Fleming was a tract of about one hundred and five acres, and embraced the spot upon which we now stand. This was in 1756, one hundred and fifty years ago, and upon it he erected the main part of this structure which you have come to memorialize to-day.

Some nine or ten years previous to that time Fleming had been licensed by the County Court to keep a tavern, which he presumably did in a log house standing on or near this site.

This house was built to take the place of the more modest structure, and it too was a public house. For the time it laid claim to considerable pretentiousness, and people came from far and near to see it.

Fleming kept tavern here, and being



Scene at Fleming Castle.

a public house, and one of the first here, I have no doubt the great Washington, when in this neighborhood lodged within its walls, especially as both Fleming and his son-in-law, Col. Lowrey, were staunch patriots and intimate with Washington. This house was called Fleming's Castle, and is said to have been the first house built here.

At one time there was in the rear a low roof extending far below the eaves, but that has been removed, to give it a more modern appearance; and within it is somewhat unique in that it has a winding stairway extending from the basement to the top floor.

Some slight additions have been made to the house by recent owners, but it is little changed.

Samuel Fleming's wife was Esther Mounier, a lady of French Huguenot extraction, and a most estimable lady she was. To her and Samuel Fleming were born ten children, one of whom rests in the little cemetery just over the knoll. Many of their descendants still live in this County.

Samuel Fleming was born in Ireland

in 1707 and died in Flemington in 1790. It is not known just when he immigrated from Ireland to this section.

Two historians at least state that when he came from Ireland he brought with him a boy of ten, named Thomas Lowrey, who afterwards became Col. Lowrey. Dr. Race in his sketch of Thomas Lowrey says this is a mistake, and that Thomas Lowrey did not come until some time later. Be that as it may, there are some well authenticated facts concerning Lowrey. He grew to manhood, married Esther Fleming, a daughter of Samuel and Esther, purchased large tracts of land, engaged in mercantile business, was eminently successful, was an officer in the New Jersey Militia, was the intimate friend of Washington, was a member of the Provincial Congress from Hunterdon County, and after the war of independence was a member of the State Legislature from Hunterdon County.

It is from him that this Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution takes its name, and most fittingly so I think.

He and his wife Esther were earnest and energetic supporters of the cause of freedom. In Esther's bosom the fires of patriotism burned with fierce intensity.

It is said that on one occasion news came at day break that the American army had met with a serious disaster. Esther was stirring and heard it early. Her blood was stirred to rage by the news. Rushing to the chamber door, she called out to her husband, "Thomas, get up and mount the old mare, and ride as fast as you can, and find out if the dom lie is thue."

Her Irish brogue, and the Irish propensity for making Irish bulls would come to the surface when she was excited.

For a time this vicinity was called "Fleming's Settlement," and as one house after another was erected to keep company with Fleming's Castle, the hamlet was called Fleming, after its founder; and afterwards another syllable was added to the appellation, and it became Flemington, which name it still bears. Just when and why the appellation was changed I have not been able to learn. I have no doubt the affix "ton" is an abbreviation of the word town, and it is possible that it may have at one time been called Flemingtown. At any rate the last syllable of the present name adds weight to the title.

This house was afterwards purchased by Dr. George Creed, who was the first physician to practice in what is Raritan Township. This was probably in 1765, and it is uncertain just when he left this vicinity. Little seems to be known of him.

The next owner of the house was the Honorable Samuel L. Southard, and we have a right to feel proud that such a man as he at one time made his home in this community. He resided in this house until about 1814, when he built the house on Main street, formerly occupied by Hon. Alexander Wurts, now by the Misses Killgore.

Mr. Southard was born in 1787 and

died in 1843. He was educated at Princeton College, then called the College of New Jersey, and afterwards called to the New Jersey Bar. He filled many honorable and important positions. He was a Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court at the early age of twenty-eight, was chosen U. S. Senator in 1821, was appointed Secretary of the Navy in 1823, and for short periods acted as Secretary of the Treasury and of War. Was Attorney General of New Jersey, in 1829, and Governor in 1832, and was again U. S. Senator from 1833 until the time of his death. In 1841 he was President of that body.

He was also the first President of the Hunterdon County Bible Society.

At an early day the property came into the possession of the Bonnell family, but I do not think any of the family resided here.

More than sixty years ago, Mr. Charles Miller, the ancestor of the present owners, entered into possession of the premises, and later became the owner of them. He occupied the place for a considerable time before purchasing it. For more than half a century his family have resided here. When Mr. Miller first moved here there was no building between this house and the Court House, and all around was vacant land.

There was quite a large circle of the Miller family once, but now only two remain, Miss Lucy Miller and her nephew, Charles. They two and a little girl whom they have taken to their hearts are the only tenants now. But, "Soft, behold! Lo, where it comes again." I speak of that ethereal, evanescent, invisible tenant of whom Mr. Vosseller told us this afternoon.

You have marked this spot, and you have done well. We have lifted the veil that curtains one hundred and fifty years that are past. For a century and a half this house has stood, and it ought to be perpetuated through centuries to come. As we lift the veil that shields this simple tablet we mark the beginning of a new era.

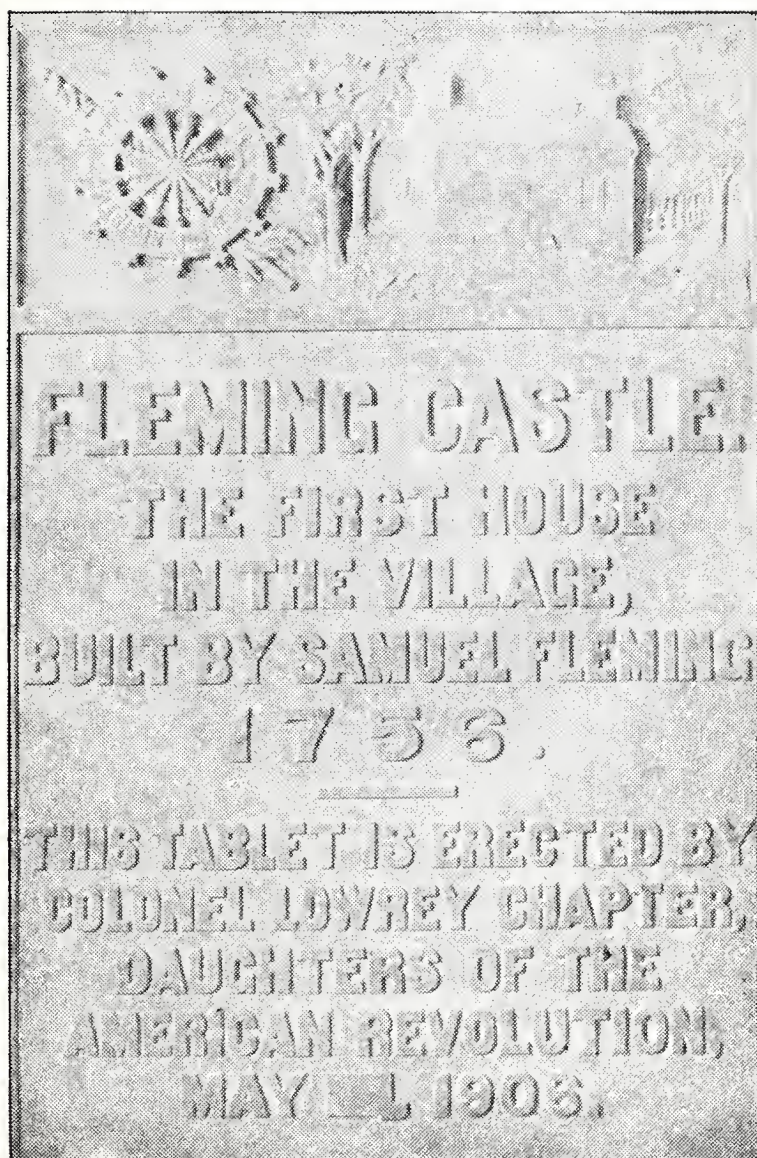


Illustration of the tablet published in the Hunterdon County Democrat of March 27, 1906, showing it before completion.

